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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: CONFERENCE CHALLENGES CONVENTIONAL WISDOM ON U.S.
ROLE IN 1967 COUP

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) In Greece, conventional wisdom holds that the United States was complicit in the April 21, 1967 coup that put a military junta in power through 1974. In a rare public conversation about these sensitive events, former PM Mitsotakis (father of current FM akoyannis) and his foundation hosted a May6-8 conference on domestic politics of the 190s, and challenged the conventional wisdom head on. The participants in the seminar, from Mitsotakis himself, to other politicians from the era and historians generally concluded that U.S. diplomats in Athens, although suspicious of the Army, were taken as much by surprise when the coup came as the Greek political establishment. In all, the conference marked one of the first objective attempts to look at this controversial period of recent Greek political history. It remains to be seen, however, whether any of the discussion will actually inform popularly held "truths" about the role of the United States in those events. End Summary.

Mitsotakis Foundation Sponsors Conference

12. (U) On May 6 - 8, the Constantine K. Mitsotakis Foundation held a three-day conference on Greek domestic politics of the 1960s leading up to the Greek army's coup d'etat on April 21, 1967 and the rise of the junta that ruled Greece until July 1974. Mitsotakis himself offered the keynote address of the conference and provided commentary throughout the proceedings. The conference, covering roughly the 1961-67 period of political upheaval that paved the way for the April 1967 coup, brought together politicians from the era, former army officers, historians and political scientists, who reviewed a broad range of political, social, economic, and military topics in an effort to outline the domestic conditions that eventually led to the army's intervention into politics and seven years of military government.

The Role of the U.S.

13. (U) The conference addressed many key questions that continue to elicit deep emotions within Greece, tapping into the political pathos born out of the catastrophic confrontation between the royalist Right and the communist Left in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Perhaps most prominent among these questions remains the role of the U.S. in Greek domestic politics in the 1960s and the

widely-held belief that it was the U.S. that actually engineered the April 21 army coup in an effort to avert the rise of a left-center political coalition to power due to fears of a communist takeover.

¶4. (SBU) In a refreshing departure from the norm, conference participants generally agreed that while U.S. diplomats in Athens feared a military intervention amid steadily increasing chaos in the streets and in the Parliament against the backdrop of revolving door governments, their understanding of the intricate conspiracies developing inside the army was neither complete nor detailed. Several speakers cited now declassified diplomatic communications which indicated that the U.S. Embassy was indeed aware of junta chief Colonel Papadopoulos, and suspected he could play a central role in an attempt to overthrow the government, but could not positively connect him to anything specific. In fact, with the protagonists of the coup working virtually undetected by even the high command of the Greek armed forces, the U.S. Embassy had anticipated that any potential military putschists would have had to approach then-King Constantine for his approval by necessity -- this assumption proved to be false. Thus, the coup, when it came in the early morning of April 21, 1967, caught both the Greek political establishment and the U.S. Embassy by surprise. As one of the speakers put it, "A handful of colonels and majors worked around 11,000 regular officers without a hint."

¶5. (U) Among the conference speakers there was general agreement that in the end, there had no direct sinister role of U.S. "secret services" in the Papadopoulos coup, that the U.S. had not expected a "rogue" group of colonels to topple the Greek government, and that the April coup

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remained very much a "Greek affair" carried out by Papadopoulos, two immediate accomplices, and perhaps a dozen or so other middle-rank officers. Not surprisingly, these conclusions were not well received by some in the audience, with some interrupting speakers to jeer and on at least one occasion to challenge the "Greek patriotism" of those making this claim

Public Reaction - Skepticism

¶6. (U) The conference drew attention and mixed reactions from the Greek media, with left-wing columnists suggesting that Mitsotakis, a leading figure in the anarchic political free-for-all of the 1960s, was in effect trying to reinterpret Greek history to present himself in a better historical light. (Note: In July 1965, Mitsotakis was the leader of a group of dissidents known as the "July apostates" who toppled the center-left government of George Papandreou -- grandfather of current PASOK leader George Papandreou. A significant segment of the older voting public and Greece's left recall the "apostasy of '65" as the immediate precursor of the April 21, 1967 military coup. End Note)

¶7. (SBU) Greek party politics and old feuds aside, however, the conference offered a rare objective look at a sensitive and complicated period of recent Greek political history, from whose negative implications the Greek political system has yet to recover. Most of the speakers approached their topics with a fresh outlook based on latest research findings and did not hesitate to challenge the conventional wisdom surrounding this painful period in Greek history.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) We were pleasantly surprised by the conference

and its general conclusions. We have also been pleased that there has been extensive reporting on the conference documents that will constitute a significant addition to the scant literature documenting this sensitive period. End Comment.

SPECKHARD